President's Message

The Springfield Historical Society will meet on Thursday evening, January 9th at 7 p.m. On the lower level of the Libbie Cass Memorial Library Our guest speaker will be Charles A. Kennedy who is an authority on the history of vaudeville in the New London-Sunapee area. Dr. Kennedy's program will review some of the famous and near-famous people in vaudeville who came to this area while they were "at liberty" [show biz talk for "out of work"] over the summer. We hope you will all join us for what promises to be a very entertaining and informative evening.

Patsy Heath Caswell,
President

CENTER SCHOOL, DISTRICT #1

The town of Springfield, NH was granted a charter on 3 January 1739 under the name Protectworth. The first settlers began arriving about 1772. During the early years, the town's people had difficulty establishing schools. It was a frontier community, not wealthy, and the War of Independence was being fought. It was not until 30 March 1789 that the town voted to raise money for both a school and a preacher. The town was divided into districts and each district was to build its own school supported by six pounds from the town for all the schools. On 10 March 1792, Protectworth was incorporated into the town of Springfield.

There is no record of how many schools had been built or how many districts were originally established. Libbie Goodhue Cass recorded the first school in town as part of a large barn across from the store. It went down in the 1938 hurricane. It was not until 1828 that Springfield divided into 13 districts and by 1845, into 14 districts. Each district had its own school committee meetings. They could decide on the length of summer and winter sessions and could raise money or "services in kind" to add to that provided by the town. There was also an overall school committee to which each district sent a member. Some of the districts lasted only a few years; others were longer lived. This article will concentrate on Center [Centre] School in District #1.

The original location of District #1 School was across from the common and church near the present cemeteries. It was across the King's Highway [Cemetery Rd] from what in the 21st century is known as the "old cemetery," located between the homes of Levi F.; and Langdon Hill.

District #1 was one of the oldest school districts and the longest in existence, serving as a school until 1949. It is unknown whether the early settlers built Center School in 1789 or in 1795 when the citizens voted to build 5 school houses. Few improvements were made in Center School over the years causing it to be declared unfit by various superintending school committees.

The first school register existing for this district was for 1857-58 school year. The 8 week summer term was taught by Lydia Sanborn. There were 24 students listed in attendance. Only 11 of those got a plus mark for "rank of a scholar" as opposed to a
zero. No one had perfect attendance, and 20 of the students were tardy one or more times. That include the Hill children who lived right beside the school. The children ranged in age from 5 to 15 years old. The school was visited by the Misters Quimby, Cole and Hill, who said that the lessons started promptly and improvement was observed. Lydia Sanborn was paid $13 for 8 weeks of teaching. Sarah Harlowe was paid $17.69 for 9 weeks in the classroom beginning in November. Some of the families attending the school were Colby, Collins, Eastman, Heath, Hill, Loverin, Quimby and Philbrick.

During the 1858-59 school year, there was one ten week session taught by A. M. Quimby. She was paid $15.56 including board. There were 38 students registered of which 11 were girls. The students ranged in age from 5 to 18 years old. These 38 students were absent a total of 205 times. Superintendent Freeman Sanborn visited the school three times and Levi Richardson visited once. There were 18 visitors in all. Miss Quimby had a little over 19 months of teaching experience before the school term.

In the town report of 1865, Superintendent Daniel Quimby did not give high marks to District #1. The building was in deplorable condition and the little shavers “were unruly, some having ...kicked out the traces this winter so it will be necessary to repare [sic] the school....” Mr. Quimby also said that the school was hardly worthy of a name. Abbie Gay taught the summer session and R. Freeman Sanborn, who followed R. Quimby as Superintendent to the School Committee, taught the winter term.

The summer and winter terms of 1868-69 were taught by Marcia E. Edwards. She labored earnestly and successfully. The school was “characterized by good order” and improvement was made in most branches of studies. There were 17 students. James Davis began teaching the winter term, but after “he taught 3 and 1/5 weeks, he died the next day after leaving the classroom.” The students had a three week vacation.

In 1871 Elwin Philbrick, superintending for the school board, wrote in his report that District #1 School...”is deadly unfit for its purpose and a disgrace to the district...” Two terms were taught in 1871-72. The summer term was taught by Belle Brown. She wrote in glowing terms about the pupils and parents. W. M. Stevens taught the fall-winter term, but wrote instead the following: “Would that I could say that the pleasant and cheerful surroundings aided in the work of instruction this winter. To learn a child must be happy; to be happy a child must be surrounded with pleasant associations. If the schoolroom be pleasant the child is made happy. What is true of the schoolroom is true of the surroundings of the schoolhouse.

A dismal room, with battered walls, whittled desks it tend [sic] to arouse a spirit of mischief in the child. What child ever saw a notch cut in a desk without trying to cut another? The parent of District #1 should remember, that a well ordered mind can never be made under the influence of neglected and untidy surroundings.”

Sometime after the critical report concerning the physical condition of District #1 School in 1871, a district school meeting appointed a committee to build a new school. In 1877, the committee presented their final report completing the building. The land, building and woodshed were purchased and completed for $731.04. The new District #1 school was built on a lot adjoining the Town Hall/Meeting House property. The Meeting House had been moved in 1851 to this location of what is now [2003] known as Four Corners Road. This building became the main school for Springfield in continuous use until January of 1949. It was voted in 1876, to auction off the old school building. The new building was one room with two front doors and a window in the attic. Pictures of the building are
part of the Springfield Historical Society file.

Addie Flanders [Philbrick] taught three terms in 1901 for a total of 20 weeks. The student population varied each term, but the average for the year was twenty. She was paid $27 for each of the first two terms and $24 for the last term. The students ranged in age from 5 to 18 years. Some of the families attending Center School at this time were Gardner, Goodhue, Morgan, Robie, Nichols, Kennedy and George.

Center School was referred to as “upgraded” in the 1917-18 school register. It was still one room. Bessie Seward Blake taught for thirty weeks and 150 days. Her salary was $48 a month. There were 21 students listed. Members of the school board who visited 14 times were Carl Philbrick, Jane Hill and Hilda Clough. There were 73 visitors during the school year among whom was Mrs. Stryker the school nurse. Some of the familiar names of students were Harland Cass, Robert and Ruby Collins, Kathryn Cross, Alice Clement, Evan and John George, Loren Patten, Beatrice and Kirk Severance, Bernard Rudner, Pauline and Fred Bailey.

For two school years, 1920-21 and 1921-22, the Maxfield School students attended Center School for a total of 20 students. Paul and Kirk Heath are examples of students who would have ordinarily gone to Maxfield School. Miss Elva Willey was the teacher.

From 25 August 1924- 19 June 1925, the 26 students registered in Center School were exposed to 7 teachers. Maud Towle [Rudner] taught 5 August to 21 November 1924; Dorothy Sutor taught from 2 December to 19 December; Ethel Cloves taught from 22 December to 16 January 1925; Hazel Varney was there from 16 January to 30 March; Florence Ward taught from 31 March to 17 April; Lillian Wilson was there from 20 April to 22 May; and Maisie Bliss finished the year! Bessie Hoague [Heath]. A fifth grade student at the time, only remembers Maude Towle!

By 1927, Hazel Little [Patten] was teaching 30 students in the 1st through 8th grades at Center School. Some of the familiar family names were Bailey, Collins, Cote, George, Metcalf, Patten, Philbrick, Saunders and Wheeler.

By 1928 Superintendent Pratt explained plans for moving Center School to the northeast corner of the lot, and enlarging it to a 2 room school. There were not enough present to vote on the issue. At the school board meeting in March 1930, Walter Gardner, Arthur Metcalf, and Harland Heath became a committee of three to investigate the possibility of moving Center School. The recommendation that they made in April 1930 was to raise $1000 to move the school house to the H. R. Severance land on the road leading from West Springfield to the Four Corners past the cemetery. The motion was defeated. The school house was not moved, but was divided into two rooms in 1930. There was one door leading into a front entryway where there was a door leading into each classroom. The two rooms were separated by a movable blackboard. The windows were removed from the front of the building and from the attic. The building remained as such until it ceased to be used as a school at the beginning of 1949. The bathroom facilities left much to be desired. There was a small room attached to the back of the building with a chemical toilet for the girls. The boys had an outhouse in back of the woodshed. Water was brought in by whoever was doing janitorial services. The sink was in the front entry. The water was used for washing hands and for drinking. By the 1940’s there were little disposable cups.

As the other district schools were closing, the population of Center School was expanding. The first two teachers to teach in the newly renovated 2 room school were Hazel Little [Patten] and Yvonne Martin [Kezar] in 1931. They kept
one register which showed a school population of 28. The following year, Yvonne Martin and Edna Hazen [Howard] began keeping separate registers. There were 16 students in grades 1-4 and 23 students in grades 5-8.

Yvonne Martin Kezar and Edna Hazen Howard continued to teach together at Center School from 1931 through 1938. In 1939, Elsie Smith began teaching the primary grades staying through the 1942-43 school year. Meanwhile Edna Howard continued for part of the 1940-41 school year to be replaced by Yvonne Kezar who taught the upper grades again in 1941-42. Ruth Ladd [Brown] taught the upper grades during the 1942-43 school year.

For the next few war years there was a succession of young teachers at Center School.  
1943-44 Rosina Digilio lower grades  
Arlene Farnsworth upper  
1944-45 Verna Sargent lower grades  
Harriet Kelly upper  
1945-46 Ruth Cahoon lower grades  
Merle Collins upper

Merle Collins remained at Center School for the following 1946-47 school year, and Marilyn Miller [Heath] arrived in town to teach grades 1-3. Marilyn Heath also taught the lower grades in 1947-48 and Josiah Kelly taught the upper grades. The last year of Center School, District #1, found Yvonne Kezar teaching the lower grades and Josiah Kelly teaching the upper grades. In January of 1949, Center School was closed for the first time and all classes moved to the new Memorial School.

The following years saw changes made to the interior of the Center School building. The sliding blackboards were removed or covered up when the pine paneling was installed. At one time the Boy Scouts met there. For many years it served as the Libbie Cass Library. When the new library was added to the wing of the Memorial Building on Main Street, the Center School building became the Springfield Historical Society Museum in 1994.  

Patsy Heath Caswell

[a more in depth paper written about the Springfield schools with references and footnotes is on file with the Springfield Historical Society]